COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT FUND

Guidance for applicants

Delivered as part of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund

HM Government

heart of england
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

West Midlands
Combined Authority

WEST MIDLANDS
Greener Together

Background

Around £70m of unspent Commonwealth Games funding has been reassigned by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport to help communities and businesses in the West Midlands, with funding being allocated across 4 pillars:

- Just under £39m being used to **bolster trade and tourism.**

- £20.8m being used to help **tackle inequalities in the region's more deprived communities.**

- Just over £4m being used to **support the region's culture and heritage sector.**

- £4m being spent on programmes to **improve environmental sustainability and people's wellbeing.**

The overarching aims of the Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund include improving the lives of local people by increasing their access to sport and culture and growing the West Midlands economy by boosting its trade and tourism sectors.

The Community Environment Fund sits within the environmental sustainability and people's wellbeing pillar and there is £1m of grant funding available.

Introduction to Community Environment Fund

The Community Environment Fund was launched in October 2023 by West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

The Community Environment Fund has £1m of grant funding available to support communities in delivering initiatives that improve the environment and people's lives.

Approximately 30 small grants of up to £25,000 and 5 large grants of up to £100,000 will be awarded for projects under the following project themes:

- **Natural environment** - to protect, restore and enhance nature and wildlife.

- **Access to green and blue space** - to provide better access to, and improve community use of green and blue space for health and wellbeing – similar to the recent Community Green Grants programme.

- **Climate adaptation** - to make communities more resilient and prepared for the impacts of climate change

- **Circular economy** - to reduce waste and keep resources and materials in use for as long as possible.

- **Environment awareness** - to improve knowledge of environment issues and support behaviour change.

WMCA has appointed Heart of England Community Foundation (HoECF) to support with the delivery of the Community Environment Fund and the application process will be managed using HoECF's website.

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How to use this guidance document

This document provides **guidance on the environmental themes of the Community Environment Fund** to help you to develop and then deliver your project to ensure it has maximum impact.

The document should be read alongside the **Applicant Information Pack** that contains information on eligibility, the application process, the questions/ requirements for the Expression of Interest stage and full application.

The application form asks you to provide a response on the impact of your project. The theme sections below provide a range of questions and metrics to support you in providing relevant detail in your application and to ensure delivery will produce good value for money. As part of your response to this question in your application:

- **Try to include specific numbers** (estimates are OK) where possible to increase your chances of success, e.g. "the project will support 200square feet of land to be transformed and engage 100 people in rewilding derelict land", rather than "we will transform our outdoor space and engage the community."

- **Only include information relevant to your project.** You do not have to complete all metrics and all themes. You should include other information and metrics that are not included.

- **Applicants should take a proportionate approach according to the size of their funding request**. Small projects (up to £25,000) are not expected to provide as much detail or evidence as large projects (up to £100,000).

- **You are welcome to discuss this with the Community Environment Fund Team** if you would like any clarity during your application. If you have any queries please contact communityenvironmentfund@wmca.org.uk

People and communities impact

The Community Environment Fund is focused on delivering the WMCA's ambition to improve environmental outcomes across the region. But this must be hand-in-hand with people and communities. Within the grant application process, and in the guidance presented here, you will see that there are significant expectations for projects to deliver measurable environmental improvements, but this must be done in a way that is inclusive and engaging. We expect all projects to also have people and communities related impacts, so please consider the following:

1. Who is your project aiming to engage with? Think about demographics - age / ethnicity / socioeconomic status / diversity.

2. How will your project support vulnerable people?

3. How many people will be engaged / supported through delivery of the project?

4. How many jobs will be created / supported through delivery of the project?

5. How many people will get new qualifications or skills as a result of project delivery?

6. How else will project delivery improve the lives of people impacts by the project? This could be a knowledge/skills, financial or health benefit.

Guidance document overview

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12 Access to green and blue space
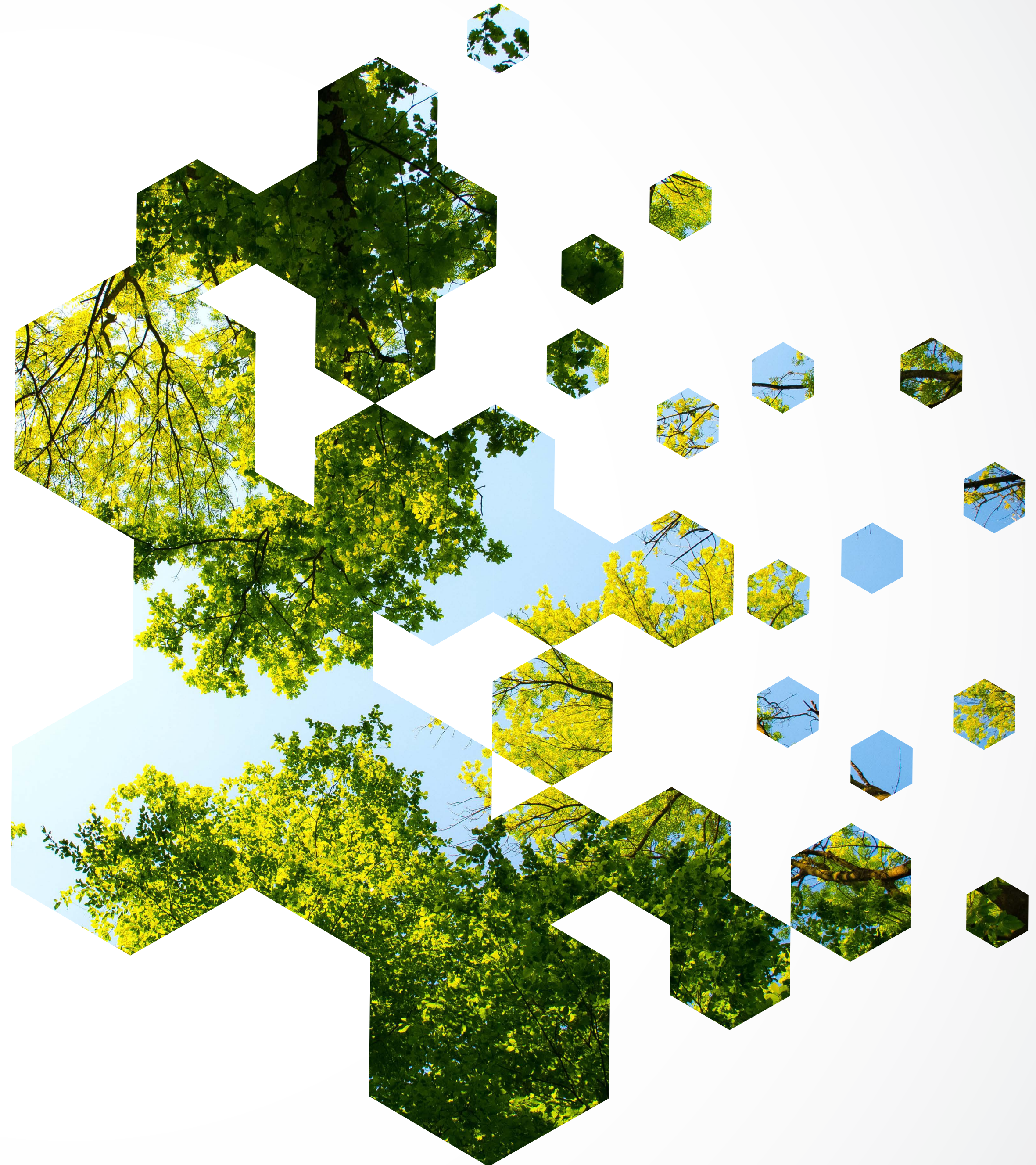
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Information covered in each theme:
- Aims
- Project examples
- Demonstrating impact and further guidance

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Natural environment aim: to protect, restore and enhance nature and wildlife.

Why is this important?

The natural environment is important to protect and improve so that we are able to look after the wildlife that depends upon it.

Having high quality green space around us improves the quality of life, health and well-being for everyone across the region.

Project examples

There are a wide range of natural environment projects that would be eligible for funding, that broadly fall into the following categories:

- Biodiversity enhancement projects in existing community spaces

- Habitat creation for pollinators, creation, restoration, enhancement and management

- Species focused projects at landscape scale

- Pond creation and river restoration

Natural environment project examples

Love Your River Stour: Cradley Heath and Lye
This project is a large-scale community focused river restoration, following on from the successful "Love Your River Stour" project in Wolverhampton and Stourbridge [Love Your River Stour | Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust (bbcwildlife.org.uk)](https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk) (BBCWT)

BBCWT secured funding from WMCA's Community Green Grants to extend this work into Lye and Cradley Heath. Working alongside local communities and with significant staff time they are transforming 3.5 hectares of ancient woodland and 2 kilometres of river. The project will improve the habitats and water quality and increase the number of local people accessing the 2 sites.

Natural environment project examples

The Froglife Trust Coalface to Wildspace

Froglife Trust is a national organisation that works to conserve the UK's amphibian and reptile species. They have secured funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund to embed community workers in Walsall and lead on increasing engagement with amphibian conservation.

WMCA's Community Green Grant also funded the wider work to pay for the restoration of two non-functioning ponds in Reedswood Park and two new ponds to increase the amphibian population in the area. There is also a programme of community work engaging with local schools and groups.

The overall aim is to create two wildlife corridors running from central to west Walsall. The area around the ponds will become an inviting accessible space for the public to engage with a neglected area of Reedswood Park.

Demonstrating natural environment impact

In addition to the generic requirements for grant funding, natural environment projects should also consider the following as part of their application:

1. What is the approximate size of habitat or land being improved through project delivery? Include a site location plan and boundary.

2. What priority habitats and species are concerned with project delivery? UK BAP Priority Habitats | JNCC - Adviser to Government on Nature Conservation and UK BAP Priority Species | JNCC - Adviser to Government on Nature Conservation

3. How will the project create, recover and/or improve habitats? Please provide further details

4. Number of trees or size of hedgerow being planted

5. Other outcomes that can be quantified in relation to the natural environment part of the project delivery

Further guidance
For this particular part of the programme, we would direct you to the following resources that might give you ideas for your application:

- Top Tips for Increasing Biodiversity - https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/mi5hzfsb/top-tips-for-increasing-biodiversity-v1-3.pdf

Webinars produced as part of the previous WMCA Community Green Grants programme:

- **Wildflower Meadows:** How to create a Wildflower Meadow with Dr Lyn Bensenyei.

- **Making a Splash - Small Ponds for Biodiversity:** How to create a pond to attract the best of British wildlife with Mike Webb, WMCA Natural Capital Programme Manager.

- **Nature on your Doorstep with the RSPB:** John Day from the RSPB on simple things we can all do to encourage wildlife in urban spaces.

ACCESS TO GREEN AND BLUE SPACE

Aim: to provide better access to and community use of green and blue space for health and wellbeing – similar to WMCA's recent Community Green Grants programme.

Why is this important?

In the West Midlands we must protect, improve and expand the quality and availability of green and blue space. This is so that our communities can enjoy our green and blue spaces and experience the myriad of benefits, from improved physical and mental health and wellbeing, to community cohesion.

Project examples

There are a wide range of access to green and blue space projects that would be eligible for funding, including the following types of projects:

- Community gardens

- Pocket parks

- Community allotments

- Wellbeing projects (mental health support, therapeutic activities, social prescribing linked to green and blue space improvement)

- Green corridors

Access to green and blue space project examples

Kings Rise Academy Knowledge in Nature (KRAKEN)
The school were successful in securing funding for elements of the KRAKEN project (Kings Rise Academy Knowledge and Education in Nature) from WMCA.

The project opened a new green space to the residents of Kingstanding giving them the opportunity to connect with nature and reap the benefits of the great outdoors.

Community Green Grants funded the creation of a wildflower meadow and 2 weekly clubs (Little Bugs Club and The KRAKEN Gardeners Club) for new users.

Before

After

Natural environment project examples

All Saints, Wolverhampton: Greening All Saints

The project turned an unused carpark at the back of the All Saints Action Network (ASAN) community and business hub into a family playground. Funding was secured through landfill funding for resurfacing and playground equipment. WMCA Community Green Grants awarded £20,206 for the biodiversity elements of the project.

This included installing a wildlife pond, raised beds, habitat boxes and bird boxes. ASAN worked with organisation The Crafty Gardener CIC to facilitate environmental activities on the site for children and families. Part of the grant was also used to improve the existing community garden and support the gardening club.

Access to green and blue space project examples

Ekho Therapeutic and Sensory Community Garden

Ekho Collective are a Community Interest Company (CIC) focused on improving wellbeing through green projects. The staff are specialists in mental health support and therapeutic horticulture.

Ekho have transformed two unused allotment plots at Hawbush in Brierley Hill into a therapeutic sensory garden. They have improved the woodland on site and installed a wildlife pond. They strive to use green gardening techniques such as a no dig approach, making their own compost and mulches and conserving water sources.

They work with isolated people helping them to gain confidence in gardening and learning about environmentally friendly gardening. They also plan to offer families affordable activities in a safe green space. The garden will become a therapeutic space for participants and a resource to continue their successful social prescribing work and food bank provision through the allotments.

Demonstrating access to green and blue spaces impact

In addition to the generic requirements for grant funding, access to green and blue space projects should also consider the following as part of their application:

1. Will the project provide new accessible space or does it significantly increase access to an existing space that is underused (removing current barriers to access)?

2. Can you estimate the size of the green or blue space that is being improved? Include a site location plan and boundary.

3. What is the green or blue space primarily used for and how will this change / improve as a result of project delivery?

4. We will look to prioritise projects that are outside an existing Natural England doorstep standard. You can find out if your project is outside or within an existing doorstep standard by using the map https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Map.aspx and selecting the "ANGst Doorstep Standard" layer and inserting your postcode.

Further guidance
For this particular Community Environment Fund theme, we would direct you to the following resources that might give you ideas for you application:

- Green space mapping:
  NEF Greenspace Dashboard (tfwm.org.uk)

CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Climate adaptation aim:
to make communities more resilient and prepared for the impacts of climate change.

Why is this important?

Our climate is changing. The world's temperature is rising and with these climate changes come changing weather patterns.

In the West Midlands we're going to see warmer, wetter winters, hotter, drier summers and more extreme weather events. These new weather events aren't what we're used to in the West Midlands.

Climate adaptation refers to the actions taken to cope with, build resilience against and even benefit from the effects of climate change.

Places, people and communities in the region will experience the impacts of climate change in different ways with the most vulnerable being most at risk.

Climate adaptation

Climate adaptation project examples

People and community resilience

A project might be working with community groups and local people to understand how they are exposed to extreme weather events and helping them to plan ahead, take action and be ready for such weather events. This could include "what if" scenarios, the use of community centre cool hubs and how the most vulnerable could be supported in their community.

Planting for the Future

The plants we grow now need to be able to cope with the changing climate and environment. To do this:

- Plant a diverse range of plants

- Select plants better suited to the changing environment

- Improve water capture and storage through water butts and sustainable drainage systems

- Reduce the expansion of invasive species.

- Plant perennials that aren't weeds, but like weeds, come back each year without much maintenance.

SUNRISE Stoke

A multi-partner-led project led by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust is enhancing urban habitats and improving connectivity between green spaces areas to create a network of natural habitats that local residents and communities can enjoy. Activities at Pool Dam Marsh and the River Trent include invasive species control, measures to prevent seasonal drying out of the wetland, which will become more common under future temperatures, re-meandering of the river channel and rotational tree management through coppicing and thinning will improve light shade regime for the watercourse.

Climate adaptation project examples

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) are designed to manage stormwater as it runs off surfaces) to mimic natural drainage.

This gradual, natural drainage reduces the volume of rainfall travelling into sewers, streams and rivers to prevent flooding.

Practical things to put in place to reduce flooding:

- Basins: a shallow depression covered with amenity or meadow grass.

- Rain gardens and rain planters

- Wetland or pond

- Permeable or pervious surfaces: hard surfaces that allows rainfall to soak through to the ground

Information and images collated from susdrain.org, 2022/3.
URL: https://flic.kr/p/22Pj3Jm

Information and images collated from susdrain.org, 2022/3.
URL: https://flic.kr/p/Ef3c3B

Information and images collated from susdrain.org, 2022/3.
URL: https://flic.kr/p/2ba3q4R

Demonstrating climate adaptation impact

In addition to the generic requirements for grant funding, climate adaptation projects should also consider the following as part of their application:

1. What climate impacts or extreme weather issues and risks is the project responding to? (e.g. heat stress, flood risk, drought, emergency response to extreme weather)

2. How will your project help people / the natural environment / our infrastructure to be more resilient/less vulnerable to the impact of climate change?

3. Is the location of your project exposed to any type of long-term flood risk? Check the long term flood risk for an area in England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

4. Can you demonstrate financial benefits generated by your project, such as: reduced exposure to flood damage or rainwater storage and reuse?

Further guidance

For this particular part of the programme, we would direct you to the following resources that might give you ideas for your application:

- WMCA Climate Impacts Assessment Report

- Climate Just case studies

Tools to identify area's vulnerability to heat/flood risk:

- Check your postcode: Is your area vulnerable to extreme heat? - BBC News

- Check the long term flood risk for an area in England - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Aim: to reduce waste and keep resources and materials in use for as long as possible.

Why is this important?

The circular economy considers what we do with items and materials, with a focus on repair and reuse rather than sending things to landfill.
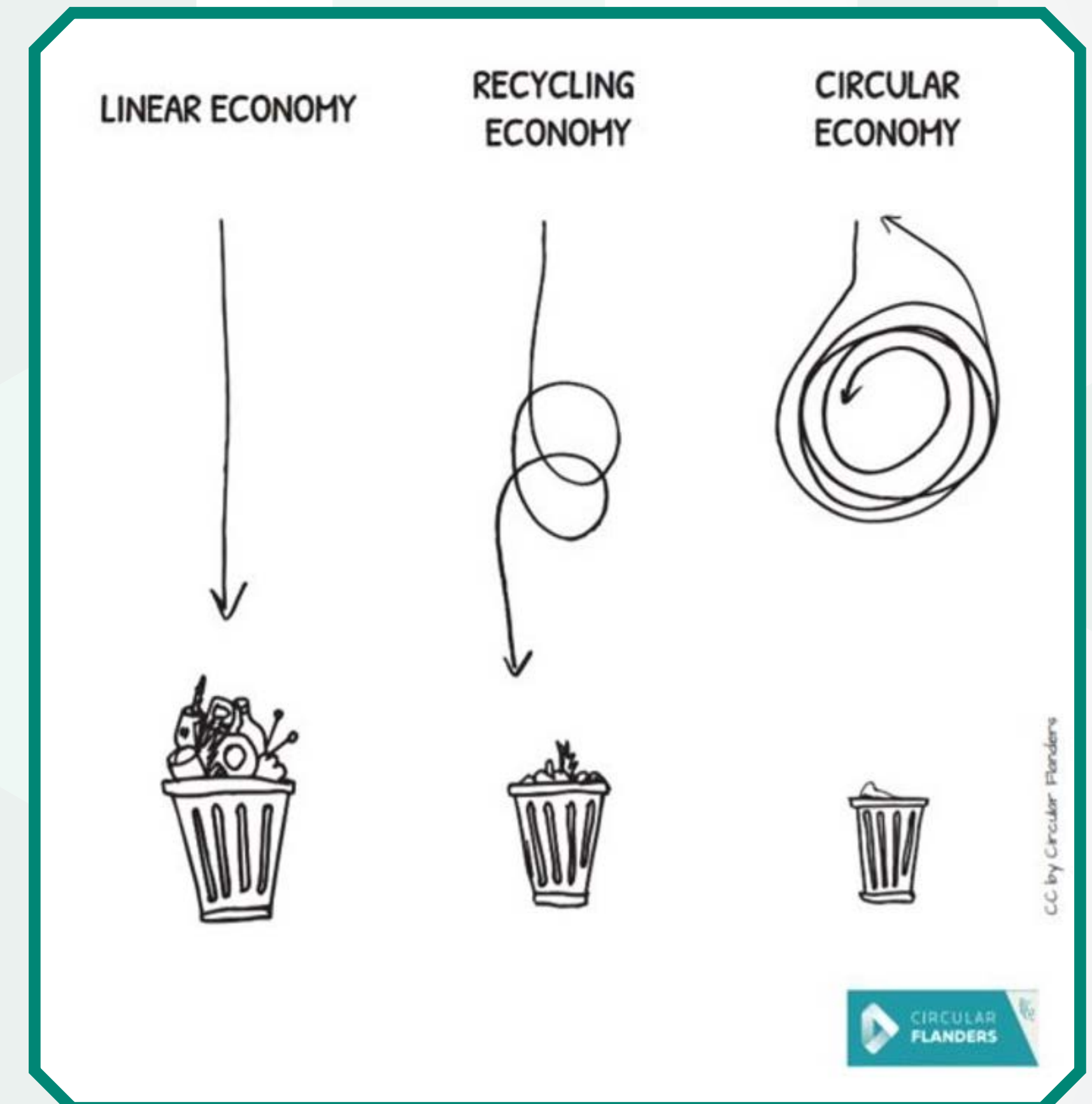
Taking action at a community level makes sure that the economic, social, and environmental benefits of a more circular economy are felt by everyone.

Introducing more circularity into our communities provides a range of benefits:

Economic – a more circular economy could generate business opportunities, and jobs

Environmental – a more circular economy could help to reduce our carbon emissions by avoiding excess waste being produced

Social – a more circular economy could reduce harmful air and water pollution, increase biodiversity, and create more cohesive communities. People can save money by keeping products in use for longer, providing more disposable income for other living costs.

LINEAR ECONOMY   RECYCLING ECONOMY   CIRCULAR ECONOMY

CC by Circular Flanders

CIRCULAR FLANDERS

Circular economy project examples

Encouraging sharing

There are some good examples of projects that encourage sharing of 'things' to reduce what is bought and thrown away.

- The **Borrow Shop** is a social enterprise space based in the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham. Customers are able to borrow more expensive household items (e.g. drills) for a couple of days at a time.

- The Active Wellbeing Society, Birmingham operates a number of **Shareshacks**. These are libraries of things but also act as community meeting spaces and host free events and activities. These include repair and upcycling workshops and cooking/exercise classes.

Image from The Active Wellbeing Society
URL: https://theaws.co.uk/active-communities/share-shacks/

Circular economy project examples

Saving resources: at the big and small scale

Reducing what is thrown away can require some organisation and access to expertise that can help. At the small scale, 'repair cafes' or 'fixing factories' have become increasingly popular. At the larger scale whole 'stores' have been set up to ensure that construction/ building materials don't get sent to landfill, but find a useful second life.

Examples include:

Balsall Heath Repair Café – operating out of the Old Print Works, the Balsall Heath Repair Café hosts regular sessions where members of the public can bring their broken items to be repaired by expert 'menders'.

Rebuild, Carlisle is a Community Interest Company working with developers and contractors to collect surplus materials and products from building sites, that would otherwise be sent to landfill. The recovered materials and products are then resold for below market price to the general public and small traders.

Image from The Rebuild Site
URL: https://www.rebuildsite.co.uk/

Demonstrating circular economy impact

In addition to the generic requirements for grant funding, circular economy projects should also could also consider the following as part of their application:

1. How will your project reduce waste and ensure products/materials/resources are kept in use for as long as possible?

2. What types of waste are being avoided through the project and what is the anticipated volume?

3. Will the waste be diverted from landfill and if so, how much will be diverted?

4. As a result of your project, can you estimate any savings or financial gains that will be generated relating to reduced waste or keeping products in use?

Further guidance

For this particular part of the programme, we would direct you to the following resources that might give you ideas for your application:

- Ellen MacArthur Foundation for general guidance

- Circular Communities Scotland

- Repair Café

- Library of Things

ENVIRONMENT AWARENESS

Environment awareness aim: to improve knowledge of environment issues and support behaviour change.

Why is this important?

Supporting people in enhancing their knowledge and understanding of environmental issues is an important first step in creating a better environment and improving lives.

It helps to encourage more sustainable behaviour by empowering people to make informed decisions and giving them motivation to act.

The solutions to environmental issues should involve people and communities so that they can have a say in how they are designed and delivered.

It is anticipated that environment awareness projects will be focused on the other themes of the Community Environment Fund covered within this guidance document.

Project examples

There are many types of projects that support raising awareness of the environment, including:

- Awareness and education

- Opportunities to support new skills

Environment awareness

Environment awareness project examples

Awareness and education

Supporting people in enhancing their knowledge and understanding of environmental issues is an important first step in creating a better environment.

There are some excellent example in the West Midlands already of ways that we can provide people with knowledge on environmental issues in an engaging and inclusive way.

Some of these are making issues more accessible, whilst others are about direct engagement. Two examples include:

1. The Conservation Volunteers host weekly **Green Gym** sessions in South Birmingham, providing a 'work out' in the outdoors to encourage people and families to lead healthier lifestyles whilst gaining new skills in gardening and food growing.

2. **Witton Lakes Eco Hub** is a former park keeper's cottage transformed into a community facility. Nature inspired craft workshops will take place people to give them the opportunity to create wildlife habitats and increase local access to green space.

Environment awareness project examples

Opportunities to support new skills

As well as providing wider awareness of environmental issues through community facilities, there is also opportunity to use funding to support development of skills. Two examples of the ways that this could happen is through:

1. **Citizen science projects.** This is where people and communities become involved in measuring and monitoring their local environments, contributing to a bigger picture of how a place is doing. National examples includes the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch or the Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count. In the West Midlands, Earthwatch have used citizen science to monitor the health of the 72 tiny forests planted as part of the Commonwealth Games conservation activity.

2. **Enabling access to training.** Natural Prospects is a programme run by the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust to provide 24 trainees with skills to work in nature conservation. Providing support in this way ensures the skilled workforce is available to protect and restore the region's natural environment. Restart in London provide free community repair training events where volunteers help people fix their own broken or slow electronic devices and small appliances, to save them from going to waste and upskill the local community.

Demonstrating environment awareness impact

In addition to the generic requirements for grant funding, environment awareness projects should also consider the following as part of their application:

1. What type of engagement are you planning to use?

2. For your participants, what skills will be gained or improved?

3. What types of behavioural change and increased knowledge do you anticipate in your participants?

4. Can you estimate the outputs and outcomes from you project? For example, the number of people changing behaviour, any cost saving from the project delivery, reduction in use of single use plastics, etc. Iif this is something that you will do at the end of project delivery please state how you will do this e.g. pre- and post-project surveys, attitude surveys, participant interviews.

5. What educational materials will be developed as part of your project and will you be willing to share these with others, so they may benefit from your experience?

Further guidance

For this particular part of the programme, we would direct you to the following resources that might give you ideas for your application:

- Our Bright Future

- The implications of behavioural science for effective climate policy – Climate Change Committee

- DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker

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www.wmca.org.uk/communityenvironmentfund

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